



Lent

The season of Lent is a fascinating time in the church year, yet many of us know very little about it. Consider the following questions and their answers. Some of the answers might surprise you!

Where did Lent get its name?

The word "Lent" originally meant "springtime." Because the church season always fell at that time of year, the name came to apply to it as well. Even after the word "Lent" was no longer used for spring, it was still used by the church to describe the season before Easter

Why does Lent last forty days?

The early church celebrated Lent only for a few days before Easter. Over the centuries, the length of the season grew until it was several weeks long. In the seventh century, the church set the period of Lent at forty days (excluding Sundays) in order to remind people of the duration of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13*).

How did the tradition of "giving up something for Lent" start?

Lent began as a time of purification and preparation. In the early church, baptism was only performed on Easter Sunday. An entire year's worth of converts to the faith would be baptized and brought into the church on that day. Lent was the time before Easter in which these converts would fast and pray, preparing themselves to be members of Christ's church.

Over the centuries, the church began to baptize and confirm people on days other than Easter Sunday. Lent was no longer a time of preparation for these events, but it remained as a special time of prayer and fasting. After the Reformation, the discipline of fasting became unpopular. Thus, as a way of preserving Lent as a time of self-sacrifice, the church leaders encouraged people to give up something during Lent that they enjoyed.

Why are pretzels associated with Lent?

Folded pretzels are a symbol for Lent because they look like arms folded in prayer.

How do Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday relate to Lent?

Mardi Gras (French for "Fat Tuesday") is the last day before Lent. Since Lent was traditionally a time of fasting, the day before it began was always a feast day. People had to use up eggs, butter, and other perishables that would not last through the Lenten season, and "Fat Tuesday" was celebrated with many traditional (and tasty!) baked goods.

The next day, Ash Wednesday, was the official beginning of Lent. After much time in prayer, people would have their foreheads marked with ashes as a sign of their repentance and humility.

What does Lent mean for us today?

Lent is still the church season in which we prepare for Easter Sunday. It is a special time of prayer and reflection, of confession and self-sacrifice. It is a time to remember the temptation, the suffering, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Most of all, it is a time to ready ourselves for the humble thankfulness and sheer joy of Easter morning—it is a time to ready ourselves to meet our risen Lord once again!



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